



News Release

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Utah 1 of Only 8 States Rated “Strong” in New Health Care Report *Still, State Faces Challenges in Assuring Quality Care for All Residents*

(Salt Lake City, UT) – The state of Utah performs well when it comes to overall health measures like quality, access and patient safety. Those measures put Utah in the top eight states according to a new report by the Department of Health & Human Services’ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).

A closer look, however, points to areas where improvement is still needed, including the number of uninsured, breast and cervical cancer care and screenings, child immunization rates and providing needed care for children with chronic health conditions.

“We’re understandably proud to again be named among the best states in the nation in health care,” said Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Executive Director Dr. David Sundwall. “At the same time, we must find ways to get more of our babies immunized, our women better protected against cancer, and our sickest children the care they need.”

The AHRQ study is summarized in the new UDOH report *Challenges in Utah’s Health Care*. Prepared by the UDOH Health Data Committee (HDC), the report is an important tool for health care leaders and policymakers as they work to make improvements.

“We’ve struggled with our child immunization rates for years now,” said HDC Consumer Representative and Voices for Utah Children advocate Terry Haven. “Despite very visible campaigns like *Immunize by 2, It’s Up to You*, our data still show a need for improvement,” she said. “Reports like this are a critical way to prompt those in power to take actions like continued and increased funding for outreach efforts, addressing access issues in our rural areas, and educating parents about the importance of immunization.”

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According to the state publication, seven of the report’s sixteen health care measures are trending in the wrong direction and need improvement. For example, challenges are found in getting Utahns to take advantage of preventive screenings, like those available for cervical, breast and colorectal cancer, as well as for sexually transmitted diseases like chlamydia. As indicated in the following chart, Utahns fall behind far behind when it comes to getting tested.

Recommended Preventive Care	Received Care	
	Utah	US
Cervical Cancer Screening (Pap test)	75%	82%
Breast Cancer Screening	64%	72%
Colorectal Cancer Screening	47%	52%
Chlamydia Screening (women only)	20%	35%

Despite these issues, Utah is the only state among 30 Southern and Western states (as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau) to receive a “Strong” rating by the AHRQ. The seven other states, all of which reside in the Northeast or Midwest sections of the country, are Maine, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, South Dakota and Wisconsin. No states received a “Very Strong” rating.

When compared to the nation, Utah hospital and home care measures were rated above average, as was patient safety in the area of obstetric injuries. Utah also did well in residents’ use of lower-cost generic drugs and showed a lower median charge for hospital admissions (\$6,416) than neighbors Arizona, Colorado and Nevada with a combined average charge of \$14,330.

The *Challenges in Utah Health Care* report can be found at <http://health.utah.gov/hda/Reports/challenges2007.pdf>. To view the AHRQ report, go to <http://statesnapshots.ahrq.gov>.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.